

A view from Israel by Hannah Weiss, with Restorers of Zion, a UMJC-endorsed ministry in Israel

The Christ at the Checkpoint Conference took place during Purim week (March 5-9). In a courageous move that proved highly controversial, a small contingent from Israel's Messianic community attended, supporting the Conference goal of "an open forum for ongoing dialogue between all positions within the Evangelical theological spectrum."

Here in Israel and abroad, a vigorous debate went on among Messianic believers about the two twisted legs on which the Conference stood: their "theology of the land," which transfers the covenantal promise of this land from the Jews to the Palestinians, and denies any scriptural support for the modern return of the Jews back to Israel; and the anti-Israel rhetoric coming from so-called Bible believers.

Pastor Wayne Hilsden, writing a Response in the name of the Israeli contingent attending the Conference, said that they hoped "to address in greater depth the serious issues that concern the messianic body, both of a theological nature and existential threats and attacks against the nation of Israel."

Premature Assessments

Our community's arguments focused mostly on whether the Israeli brethren participating in the Conference would be catalysts to replace these distortions with truth—as they desired and hoped—or be used as window dressing to give the distortions respectability.

As a defense, Conference organizers repeatedly stated that there was room for disagreement

on both theology and political conviction, that these were secondary compared to our kinship in the Kingdom, and that the Conference would transcend the disagreements. At least that was the position before and during the Conference.

The Messianic Israeli participants accepted this reassurance at face value: “We hope and pray that our willingness to accept the invitation to participate in the conference has opened a door for us to strengthen genuine relationships with our Arab brothers and sisters. We trust that in the context of such relationships we will be able to address in greater depth the serious issues that concern the messianic body” (from a Brief Response by Wayne Hilsden).

It takes time for real attitudes to assert themselves after the euphoria of affirmative words, hugs and audience applause. As Hilsden cautioned the critics, “The impact of the conference has yet to be assessed.”

Can We Assess Now?

There were eyewitness reports of a few quiet relationships in formation, of individuals admitting that they needed to rethink certain points, and even of public apologies for hasty conclusions or unfair generalizations. One month is too short a time to discover if these encounters will go on to spark real shifts toward truth-telling. But a month is time enough to discover if Christ at the Checkpoint made any attempt to pay their respects to the broad “Evangelical theological spectrum” they were so proud to host and to hug.

Reconciliation begins with enlarging one’s boundaries to grant validity to the other side—not validity AT THE EXPENSE of the truth, but validity BASED ON the truth. We acknowledge whatever truth is found in their perception, which we realize is missing from ours. The sign of a real reconciliation is in public statements issued to our own community that acknowledges the needed changes—otherwise known as “repentance.”

The Israeli Zionist side of the Conference was free with reconciliatory statements to the Messianic community, as noted above. What about the anti-Zionist side? Let’s look to the two Conference legs for signs of “untwisting,” which will show that the other side is embracing new truth.

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